

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 11 December 1998

Present: Professor IR Macdonald (Convener), Professor PR Duff, Dr JH Farrington, Dr WF Long, Dr NLM Milne, Mr C O'Sullivan, Professor LD Ritchie, Dr JG Roberts, Professor AA Rodger, Dr JG Simpson, Professor PJ Sloane, Dr IR Torrance, Professor DW Urwin and Mr D Welsh with Mr JA Forster, Mr F Lovie, Dr G Mackintosh, Mr JLA Madden, Dr PJ Murray, Mr G Pryor and Dr T Webb (Clerk) in attendance.

Apologies: Professor DF Houlihan, Professor SD Logan, Professor PA Racey and Ms YS Gordon.

MINUTES

158. The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 1998.
(Copy filed as UCTL/111298/138)

QUALITY AUDIT REPORT

- 159.1 The Committee received a copy of the QAA's Quality Audit Report, which had been published recently, and an initial response to the points for further consideration.
(Copy filed as UCTL/111298/139)
- 159.2 The Committee noted that a summary of the Report, incorporating the conclusions, points for commendation and points for further consideration (with the initial response to the latter) had been sent to all staff and students who had met the Auditors as part of the Audit visit in May 1998. The summary would be circulated with the Senate papers for the meeting on 27 January 1999. A copy of the full report had been circulated to the Academic Standards Committees.
- 159.3 The summary had also been placed on the University's web-site, and allowed the full Audit Report to be downloaded (by staff and students) from any networked PC on campus. The summary report and details of the WWW address for downloading the full report had been e-mailed to all Heads of Department and to Departmental e-mail contacts (to forward to all staff within their Department). Also, a press release would be announced and appropriate items would be placed in the University Newsletter and in *Gaudie* by the Public Relations Department.
- 159.4 In regard to the Auditors' points for further consideration, the Committee noted that several of these had already been identified by the University in the *Analytical Account*. The Committee discussed each of the points for further consideration and agreed that action should be taken as summarised in Appendix I.
- 159.5 The Committee noted that the University would be required to send a progress report to the QAA in November 1999 on how the University was responding to the audit

report. To monitor progress in this regard, reports on the implementation of the University's response to the Auditors' points for consideration would be submitted to the Committee, as appropriate.

Action: Clerk

- 159.6 Since the Report was generally extremely complimentary, the Committee considered how the University might use the Report for recruitment purposes. The Committee noted that the Director of Student Recruitment Services (SRS) was preparing extracts for the new Prospectuses, and would incorporate an appropriate item in the next Recruitment Update leaflet. The Clerk was asked to discuss with the Directors of SRS and of Public Relations (a) the production of a one-page "flyer" to highlight commendable issues arising from the Report and how the University was addressing the points for further consideration; (b) to discuss how the University could make use of the Report in publications such as the Good University Guide; and (c) to investigate the possibility of making use of the University's home page to highlight the Report during Clearing.

Action: Clerk

- 159.7 The Committee also asked the Convener and Clerk to discuss mechanisms for acknowledging the commitment of staff to the quality assurance and enhancement framework, which had been commended by the Auditors.

Action: Clerk

- 159.8 The Convener expressed his thanks once again to all those who had participated in the Audit.

MERIT CERTIFICATES

- 160.1 The Committee received a paper concerning Merit Certificates (*Copy filed as UCTL/111298/140*). This had been prepared as a consequence of a Head of Department suggesting that a prospective employer, when considering a student's transcript, might assume, erroneously, that courses with CAS marks 12-14 were not defined as being of Lower Second Class Honours standard because Second Class Merit Certificates were not awarded for such courses. The Head of Department had suggested that Merit Certificates at Honours level served no purpose and were indeed potentially detrimental in view of the above. The Committee noted that several possible options were available.
- 160.2 After discussion, the Committee considered that Merit Certificates should continue to be recorded on a student's transcript and that there should be no change to the current procedures.

STUDENT'S WORK AFFECTED BY THEIR UNDERTAKING PAID EMPLOYMENT

- 161.1 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine), in undertaking the course review exercise for the second half-session of 1997/98, had referred to the UCTL a request from the Department of Zoology concerning the University's formal attitude on the position to be adopted by course organisers towards students whose coursework was affected adversely by their being in paid employment.

- 161.2 After discussion, it was agreed that the University should have a general policy statement on the issue. The Committee considered a proposed form of words and agreed that this should be redrafted in light of the discussion and submitted to the next meeting for consideration, before being referred to the Senate.

Action: Clerk

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS ENTERING WITH ADVANCED STANDING
(Minute 151.3 Refers)

- 162.1 The Committee received a report in regard to the number and distribution of students who had entered the University with advanced standing in 1997/98 and 1998/99.
(Copy filed as UCTL/111298/141)
- 162.2 In discussing this issue, the Committee noted that the MA Regulations stipulated that while candidates may be admitted direct to the second session of study for the degree they must obtain not fewer than 28 credits within their first session of attendance. This was four credits more than the normal annual load for the MA degree.
- 162.3 Since the University was trying to encourage entry with advanced standing, particularly into year 2 of a degree programme, the Committee considered that the MA Regulations placed potential direct entry students at a disadvantage by requiring an additional workload in their first year of study when compared with that of other second year students who had entered the degree in year one. The Committee therefore asked that this issue be referred to the Undergraduate Programme Committee (Arts & Social Sciences) for consideration.

Action: FL

**IDENTIFICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF EXAMPLES
OF GOOD PRACTICE**

- 163.1 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine) had welcomed the recent circulation by the UCTL of an example of good practice (in the assessment of oral presentations) identified by the ASC (Postgraduate). The ASC (SEM) had requested that the UCTL give consideration to introducing a more pro-active role in identifying and disseminating examples of good practice.
- 163.2 The Committee noted that the Convener had asked the Clerk to bring forward proposals to the Committee in due course.

Action: Clerk

MODULARISATION, TIMETABLING AND COLLABORATION

- 164.1 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine) had referred to the UCTL a comment from an External Examiner in Agriculture who had reported that students had commented adversely on the apparent disparity between advertised choice and that made possible by the timetable. He considered that this might affect recruitment and student satisfaction. The Head of the Department had responded that the Department recognised that subject choice

was sometimes severely limited by timetable considerations and that he considered the University's timetabling arrangements at Levels 3 and 4 to be extremely inefficient: the lack of a uniform course and timetable structure made cross-Department and especially cross-Faculty collaboration virtually impossible and prevented many of the potential benefits of modularisation from being realised. The Department had re-stated its previous request that the introduction of a uniform and efficient timetable operating across Faculties be investigated.

- 164.2 The Committee noted that the above comment had been referred to the Working Party on Undergraduate Modularisation.

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM EXERCISE

- 165.1 The Committee noted that the Academic Standards Committee (Science, Engineering and Medicine), in undertaking the course review exercise for the second half-session of 1997/98, had referred to the UCTL a request from the Department of Zoology that courses for which consecutive excellent responses had been received be permitted to be evaluated on a biennial basis until the course had been either changed or failed to perform the previous excellent standards.
- 165.2 The Committee noted that this had been referred to the Working Party on Undergraduate Modularisation.

QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

166. The Committee noted that the Quality Assurance Agency's bulletin *Higher Quality* No. 4, which had been circulated to all members, outlined the QAA's proposals for the future quality assurance framework. These would be discussed at a future meeting once the QAA had announced details of the procedures for implementing the framework.

Action: Clerk

PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING (Minute 147 refers)

167. The Committee noted that a paper would be submitted to the next meeting.

Action: JAF

QUALITY AUDIT REPORT

The auditors' points for further consideration as listed in paragraphs 87 and 88 of the Quality Audit Report are reproduced below. The University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL)'s response, as agreed on 11 December 1998, is given in bold text.

Points for further consideration

87. As it continues to develop its processes for the assurance and enhancement of quality and academic standards, the University may consider it advisable to:

- (i) extend the use of external participants in Internal Teaching Reviews (paragraph 39);

The UCTL, in 1997, considered appointing external subject experts to Internal Teaching Review Panels but decided to await the outcome of discussions on the future arrangements for external quality assurance within the UK. Following a sector-wide consultation between March-May 1998, the QAA announced its plans for a new UK quality assurance framework in October 1998. While details of the new framework were awaited, the UCTL agreed that, on a trial basis, the Internal Teaching Review Panel for two of the remaining seven Departments to be reviewed in 1998/99 should include an external subject expert. The Deans of the Faculties of Arts & Social Sciences and Social Science & Law agreed that the additional cost in using an external subject expert should be met by the relevant Faculty.

Action: Clerk

- (ii) invite the University Committee on Teaching and Learning to initiate a debate on explicit standards in terms of explicit outcomes at subject level (paragraphs 47-48);

The Committee noted that the University was not participating in the pilot trials of the proposed quality assurance arrangements in regard to the benchmarking of standards (in Chemistry, History and Law) but that representatives of the University had been involved in the relevant benchmarking groups. The UCTL asked that information be obtained from the Quality Assurance Agency in regard to the latest position on benchmarking in the three pilot subjects and that this be considered at the next meeting. The Committee also asked that proposals be prepared concerning the initiation of a debate, as suggested by the Auditors, for consideration at the next meeting: this should involve using the expertise of those of the University's staff who had been involved in the benchmarking exercise in the three pilot subjects.

Action: Clerk/JAF

- (iii) speed up action on practical aspects of the declared policy of the extension of resource-based learning (paragraph 69);

The UCTL noted that this policy was now being implemented as a priority through a new project in the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD) which was known (provisionally) as

the Promoting Independent Learning programme. The programme was being run by Moira Fraser, a new appointee to the CLPD, and a briefing paper on it would be provided for the next meeting of the UCTL.

Action: JAF

88. In addition, the University may consider it desirable to:

- (i) promote a more proactive approach to the dissemination of good practice in teaching and assessment (paragraphs 31, 38 and 68);

The UCTL noted that the good practice which was identified in Internal Teaching Review Reports would be collated. Also, the appointment of new staff in the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (see 87 (iii) above) would allow it to adopt a more proactive approach to further assist staff in sharing innovation and good practice, as recommended by the Auditors. The Committee considered that the Academic Standards Committees and the Deans be asked to send the Clerk details of examples of good practice which they identified e.g. arising from Internal Teaching Reviews, External Examiners' Reports, the Student Course Evaluation Form exercise, or from general discussions of teaching and learning issues. This information would be collated and sent to the Director of the Centre for Learning Professional Development, who was asked to adopt a proactive approach in the dissemination of good practice e.g. by organising staff development events, possibly on a Departmental or Faculty basis, in regard to how particular topics could be implemented within Departments.

Action: JAF/Clerk

- (ii) systematise the circulation of reports arising from external accreditation visits (paragraph 45);

Although accreditation reports informed planning and review at the departmental level, they were not routinely considered centrally prior to the Audit Visit. The UCTL (February 1998) had agreed that Heads of Department should forward accreditation reports to their Dean, with a commentary on the action to be taken; and that Deans should refer issues to the relevant Academic Standards Committee for information or action as deemed appropriate. The UCTL agreed that this process be systematised during 1998/99, as suggested by the Audit Team.

Action: Clerk

- (iii) review its approach to the provision of study skills (paragraph 59);

The Committee noted that the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD) had been asked to undertake, through the Promoting Independent Learning programme (see 87 (iii) above), an evaluation of the compulsory Study Skills course for all first-year MA and BD students. It would also take cognisance of the proposed course for Science students entitled *Tools for Science* (which would be offered from September 1999). Since there was overlap and interpenetration between those skills required by a student to benefit fully from a university education and those skills required for employment, the Committee asked the Director of the CLPD to ensure that the project also incorporated discussion with the Director of the Careers and Appointments Service. The Director of the CLPD also was asked to

consider whether the project could incorporate a review of the three (optional) study skills lectures which were provided in September 1998 for students entering with advanced standing; and how the views of Access/Summer School students could be obtained in regard to the provision of study skills, to determine whether they experienced difficulties in making the transition and, if so, what these difficulties were.

Action: JAF

- (iv) ensure that the Codes of Practice on undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and research are visible to all staff (paragraph 67);
The UCTL noted that the Codes of Practice had been available on the University's Web-site since September 1997. However, in response to the Audit Team's suggestion, all Heads of Department had been sent the three Codes of Practice by e-mail and asked to ensure that all staff within their Department were aware of the Codes. Heads of Department had also been invited to consider reviewing their Department's application of the Codes. The Committee noted that a Department's use of the Codes would be audited via the Internal Teaching Review process.

Action: Clerk

- (v) take steps to increase the perception amongst staff of the recognition accorded to teaching when making promotions to Senior Lecturer, perhaps by making more explicit the scores given in the system used for promotion (paragraph 70).
The Committee considered that draft proposals to address the above should be prepared as a matter of urgency and considered by the UCTL before formal submission to the Promotions Committee. It was envisaged that guidelines should be provided to encourage staff to produce a portfolio to demonstrate good teaching practice as part of their *curriculum vitae*: this could include reference to feedback obtained from students e.g. via the Student Course Evaluation Form exercise, and evidence from peer observation of teaching. The Committee considered that the guidelines might incorporate a checklist of the types of information which staff could submit to support an application for promotion based on teaching ability.

Action: JAF